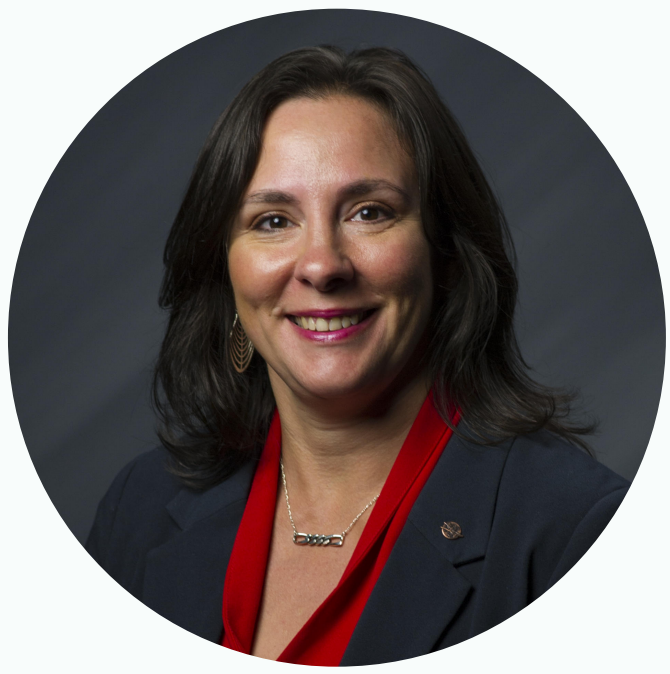
STENNIS SPACE CENTER

Profiles in Leadership



Maggie Jones
Deputy Director
Safety and Mission Assurance Directorate

During her childhood, Mandeville, Louisiana, native Maggie Jones enjoyed working puzzles and solving logic problems. She initially set her sights on becoming an architect, since she felt work in that field would be like solving a giant puzzle of where objects are supposed to fit spatially. As time went on, Jones became increasingly interested in the mechanical movement of objects, rather than their spatial configuration. Her focus shifted to NASA when she was in the sixth grade on a visit to Marshall Space Flight Center. Jones was completely awestruck, and from that day on, she wanted to work for NASA. As an undergraduate student, Jones pursued a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering at Louisiana Tech University. She continued her education by pursuing a Master of Science in Mathematics at the University of New Orleans. Jones began her career at Stennis in 1999, completing a research project while enrolled as a graduate student that culminated in her hiring as a contractor. She continued working in the Stennis contractor workforce until 2008, when she joined NASA as a quality engineer. Jones began her current role as the deputy director of the Stennis Safety and Mission Assurance Directorate in 2013.

How would you describe the Stennis culture and environment?

Stennis is an increasingly diverse place to work. Also, the young people being educated right now are more diverse, not just in terms of gender, but in the sense that they are representing all walks of life. I am really excited about what is coming for the next generation. The culture of Stennis is great for everybody. The fact that people spend 30-40 years working at Stennis is an indication of its strength as a diverse and inclusive workplace.

What is your biggest career challenge so far?

The biggest challenge so far was when I transitioned from being a contractor to a civil servant. I was about 10 years into my career and going into a new job in a different field. I had worked for the information technology contract, doing risk management and a variety of projects. However, I had not been directly engaged in engine testing at Stennis. What I learned from the transition is that there were many times when it helped to just listen up, over-research the answers to my questions, and pay attention to the people who had done the job for many years and were the experts.

Was there a mentor that shaped your career?

When I was in graduate school, I had the opportunity meet people while applying for a research program. One of them was Freddie Douglas, who was most recently my my boss at Stennis. We had a meeting of the minds, and we saw the world the same way. We are different people with different personalities, but we had similar viewpoints on how processes and improvements should work. Freddie has been a significant mentor throughout my career. He was always willing to show me the way and share his insight from being 20 years ahead of me in his NASA career. I owe him a lot for getting me to where I am today.

What would you say to students who aspire to work at NASA?

Do not allow yourself to be put in a category in which you think that your options will be limited, because there are so many different opportunities to get involved at NASA. Many students are going to have jobs that may not even exist right now because of the ever-changing landscape. There are a lot of areas you can study where you can end up in an industry or career field that excites you. NASA employs a variety of specialists.

How do you define leadership, and what are its qualities?

Leadership is the ability to inspire people to move in a certain direction. That direction may be to be great at their job, to accomplish a certain project, or whatever else. I think the primary qualities that make you very effective as a leader are integrity, authenticity, and communication skills. Leadership is about owning who you are, being comfortable with that, and sharing that with others, because people tend to follow people they trust.

What are you most proud of regarding your work with Stennis and NASA?

When I look out at the group of people that make up the Safety and Mission Assurance Directorate, I have to say they are probably the nicest, most caring people you will find in any organization. For a lot of people working here, it is more like a calling than it is a job. They really feel strongly about protecting people and keeping them safe. When you have folks with whom you can communicate well, get along, and work together toward solutions, it is really motivating.